

**James Madison to Edmund Pendleton, January 16, 1781. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.**

**TO EDMUND PENDLETON.<sup>1</sup>**

1 From the Madison Papers (1840).

Philadelphia, January 16, 1781.

Dear Sir, —I was very glad at not being disappointed in my expectation of a favor from you by yesterday's post. Several reports, in quick succession, of the arrival and progress of the predatory band under Arnold, had rendered us exceedingly anxious to hear the truth and particulars of the matter. Some letters, by the post, tell us that the Governor and Baron Steuben were wholly engaged in removing and securing the arms and ammunition. If so, he was better employed than in writing to Congress on the subject, which, from his usual punctuality, was expected. The enterprise against Richmond, at this season, was certainly an audacious one, and strongly marks the character which directed it. Having been long sensible that the security of the country, as high up as the tide-water reaches, has been owing more to the ignorance and caution of the enemy than to its own strength or inaccessibleness, I was much less astonished at the news than many others. To those who are strangers to the sparse manner in which that country is settled, and the easy penetration afforded by its long, navigable rivers, the rapid and unopposed advances of the enemy appear unaccountable, and our national character suffers imputations which are by no means due to it.

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Congress have yet received no official report of the result of the conciliatory measures taken with the revolted soldiers at Trenton. From oral and circumstantial evidence, there is no doubt that they have been successful. A discharge of a part from the service, and a supply of clothing and money to the rest, is the price of their submission. This much, considered in itself, was required by justice, and is, consequently, consistent with

dignity. But, considered with respect to the circumstances attending the negotiation, there is but too much ground to suspect that it will be attributed to our fears, and is, therefore, not a little mortifying. Happily, the example, as we understand by a letter from General Washington received yesterday, had not infected the other parts of the army. As the same causes, however, which engendered this malignant humour in the Pennsylvania line, are known to exist in the other lines, we cannot be sure that the same effects will not yet take place in the latter, unless they be speedily removed. As one step towards it, Congress are endeavouring to profit by the alarm which this event must have excited in the States, by calling upon them for the means of immediately furnishing some pay to the troops of their respective lines.

You ask me what I think of the Delegate Extraordinary to Congress.<sup>1</sup> I wish you had told me what you think of such an appointment. It is pretty certain, I believe, that people in general will not consider it as a proof of confidence in the ordinary delegation. As Mr. Jones, who, I believe, possesses the confidence of his country, and, I am sure, will have as much weight in Congress as any man that will be sent on such an occasion, will come about the same time, and, having attended the Legislature, will be as well informed in every point of view, I cannot deny that the appointment appears to me to be, at least, a supernumerary one. I wish the good effects of it may show that I am mistaken.

<sup>1</sup> The father of the proposition to send such a delegate was Patrick Henry. There was a ballot for the delegate and the House evenly divided between the Speaker, Benjamin Harrison, and R. H. Lee. The casting vote being with the Speaker, who could not vote for himself, an embarrassing situation was presented, which Lee relieved by withdrawing

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from the contest, “so that Harrison stood elected. Braxton says the old fellow was so disgusted with the vote that he believed he would resign the appointment.” Jones to Madison, January 2, 1781, *Letters of Joseph Jones*, 65, 66. The object of the appointment was “to lay before Congress a clear state of the war in this quarter, the resources of this State in men, money, provisions,” etc., and to concert measures “necessary in the present conjuncture of affairs in the South.”— *Journal of House of Delegates*, 35; Rives, i., 269, 270.

The trade of this city has just suffered a very severe blow. No less than seven fine vessels have been taken out of an outward bound fleet, and carried into New York.

The emissary from Clinton, and his guide, were executed on Saturday morning last.